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ABSTRACT

Defining myth as a cultural narrative in symbolic form that articulates a world view and offers consensus with that view, this paper uses a brief "New York Times" report on the Soviet shooting down of South Korean airline flight 007 as the basis for comparison of international news and myth. Following a review of the literature on myth and news, the paper discusses a method--hermeneutics--adapted from the field of myth analysis, for the study of international news as myth. Specifically, the paper suggests an adaptation of the hermeneutic system of Paul Ricoeur as the most appropriate method for an examination in detail of the structure and content of the news report in question and its relation to myth, proceeding from structural analysis to metaphoric signification, to construction of the world text (which for Ricoeur means "world view"), and finally to appropriation--the individual reader's possible understanding of self as derived from the text. The paper also considers some limitations of the hermeneutic approach, such as the microscopic nature of the study and the fact that analyses do not lead easily to predictions of future results, as in empirical research. The paper also explores the conceptual implications of news as myth, advocating that news might be studied not only as a report of events--in this case the shooting down of an airliner--but as a symbolic form of culture. A four-page reference list is appended. (NKA)

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MYTH, METHOD AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Winner of the James W. Markham Award

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MYTH, METHOD AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS

> A South Korean airliner missing with 269 people on a flight from New York to Seoul was shot down in the Sea of Japan by a Soviet jet fighter near a Soviet island off Siberia, the United States said yesterday.
>
> There were no known survivors of the attack, in which a heat-seeking missile was said to have been fired without warning at the airliner by an interceptor that had tracked it over Soviet territory for two and a half hours.
>
> President Reagan expressed "revulsion" over what he called "a horrifying act of violence." He cut short his California vacation and called a national Security Council meeting in Washington today to discuss possible reprisals.

On Sept. 2, 1983, the above report appeared on page one of the New York Times. It's a powerful, well-written lead for an account of a momentous event -- the Soviet shooting of Korean Air Lines Flight 007. Two hundred and sixty-nine people died. The international scene was embittered by condemnations of the Soviet action, as well as Soviet protests that the jet was on an American spying mission. Relations between the United States and

Soviet Union were charged with dangerous tension.

Surely the Times page-one account captures the enormity of the act and fulfills the requisites of a solid news lead. It provides excellent details of "the five Ws and H," telling who and what were involved, when and where the action took place, and why and how the shooting could possibly have occurred. The account has timeliness, interest, impact, and other qualities of news. John Merrill (1968, p. 5) says news should be "the account of world happenings." Fred Siebert (1956, p. 51) says news should "assist in the process of solving political and social problems by presenting all manner of evidence and opinion as the basis for decisions." The Times lead certainly begins to meet these criteria of news.

Yet perhaps the Times report accomplishes even more than gathering an account of world happenings and presenting the information to the public. A close reading finds curious, suggestive elements in the lead. For example, the charges in the key first paragraph, receive provocative attribution: "the United States said yesterday." Of course, the attribution is not literal. Government spokepersons made the charges, the report later reveals. In most news reports, sources of information are identified quite specifically -- by name, title or position. For this account, however, the sources have been replaced by the entire United States.

In linguistic terms, the replacement is called a synecdoche, the representation of a whole by a part or a part by a whole. A

synecdoche is a metaphor, a figure of speech containing an implied comparison. In linguistic terms, the synecdoche, "the United States said yesterday," implies that charges by a few government spokespersons are charges by the nation. The metaphor suggests a national consensus. The metaphor suggests a unified, cultural response.

Close inspection of the second paragraph also reveals intriguing details. The paragraph clearly states the fatal missile was fired "without warning." Further in the report, however, this statement is contradicted. It is unclear if warnings had been issued. Indeed, the Soviets say warnings had been given. But the issue does not even seem pertinent. No warning mitigates 269 deaths. By raising the issue of the airliner being shot "without warning," the report appears to strive for a particular effect. The account appears to be a portrayal of evil. "There were no known survivors," the paragraph begins. A heat-seeking missile was fired without warning after an interceptor tracked the jet for two and a half hours. Although contrary to its own facts, the report offers a pure dramatization of evil. A terrible, complex, international tragedy is portrayed as simple, calculated, cold-blooded murder.

In this context, the third paragraph makes sense. The report abruptly halts the portrayal of the attack, and the paragraph begins, "President Reagan expressed 'revulsion'." There is a naturalness to the President appearing so quickly in the report. Certainly the reaction of the President -- a man of

tremendous power and influence -- is of news value. But his reaction might be interpreted in another fashion. It is as if the evil portrayed in the previous sentences demands an immediate, urgent reaction, a reaction by the President, the leader of the U.S. community referred to in the first paragraph of the report. It is as if the text offers not only information but a reaction to the events. The report could have continued with a description of events. Leaders of the United Nations or other international groups might have been cited on this truly international incident. But the report gives the President third-paragraph prominence. The report yields to the response of the communal leader.

Thus, the Times lead appears to move beyond observing and reporting upon events. The report appears to bear a communal countenance. The news report can be seen as a cultural narrative offering a view of the world's events and suggesting reactions to those events. Such narratives, traditionally, have been considered myths.

Now to say news is myth may seem to be saying that black is white, or true is false. In popular use, myth is a false or incredible tale, something to be contrasted with reality, as in this use: "News as Myth: Myth or Reality?" In other use, myth is limited to only ancient Greek or Roman tales. But these are shrunken, lifeless views of myth. For many scholars in anthropology (Levi-Strauss, 1967), psychology (Jung,

1959), religion (Eliade, 1959), philosophy (Ricoeur, 1976), communications (Barthes, 1972) and other disciplines, myth is modern, dynamic, essential.

Following these writers, for the purposes of this discussion, myth is defined as a cultural narrative in symbolic form that articulates a world view and offers consensus with that view. Thus, myth is not a set of fixed stories or plots. Myth is a form -- that is, structure and content -- adapted to a function, the representation and confirmation of shared belief. I want to suggest that in form and function, the international news report is comparable to myth. Along with its traditional role of reporting world events, the news may be offering the representation and confirmation of shared belief. International news -- explaining events to different cultures and serving as a bridge between cultures and nations -- seems particularly suited for a comparison with myth.

The comparison of news and myth allows the exploration of the structure and content of the news report and the investigation of the cultural role of international news, as well as opens up a variety of conceptual and methodological avenues for international news research. The purposes of this paper then are: a) to review the literature on myth and news; b) to suggest a method, adapted from the field of myth analysis, for the study of international news as myth.

A comparison of news and myth does not argue against traditional notions of news as observer of the state, and

informer and entertainer of the public. Myth has always observed, informed, and entertained. But if news is in some ways like myth, it does more than observe and inform; it serves as an integral form of cultural expression; it bears traces of how a community portrays and understands itself, and how that community views the world. This paper offers an approach to international news as a symbolic form that participates in the creation and confirmation of culture. It offers not a critique of news, nor a better approach to news, but merely an alternative approach that might offer different insights into international news.

News as myth is no semantic twist, then, no metaphor. To say news is like myth is to invest it with the greatest responsibilities. Freud (1959) said man erects cultural forms such as myth to protect himself against nature. In this sense, nature has a sinister, challenging meaning. It is chaos and randomness and danger and man's capacity for evil and his God's seeming silence and, above all, it is death. The forms of culture are man's attempt to channel his aggressions, punish his transgressions, establish order amid chaos, provide a means to hear his God's voice, and affirm man's life in the face of death. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur (Van Den Hengel, 1982, p. 259), captures the possibilities of cultural forms: "Man is the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite."

As a cultural form, myth helps create and is created by culture. And to say international news is like myth, is to say that news too is participating -- perhaps has been participating

all along -- in the creation and confirmation of culture. Perhaps a news account of the shooting down of an airliner and the anguished reaction of a nation in some way creates and confirms who we are.

RESEARCH TRADITION

Support for a study of international news as myth can be found within a varied, eclectic, tradition of communication research. This section will review past approaches which can provide a theoretical framework for a study of international news as myth.

The great student of news, Walter Lippmann, conceived of the news report as a dramatic portrayal, a view that is basic to a comparison of news and mythic narratives. News captures attention by a process of "provoking feeling in the reader, of inducing him to feel a sense of personal identification with the stories he is reading," Lippmann said (1922, p. 355). "The audience must participate in the news, much as it participates in the drama, by personal identification."

While not denying the notion of news as observer of governments and informer of publics, Lippmann elaborated a thoughtful view of news as a presentation of reality. He emphasized that to become news, events must first be selected and presented. "Every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have, " Lippmann wrote (1922, p. 354). "There are no objective standards here. There are conventions."

Thus, in its roles of informing and observing, the news "is not a first hand report of the raw material. It is a report of

that material after it has been stylized," he said (1922, p. 347). Although Lippmann did not connect the dramatic, stylized news reports with myth, his views are an important consideration for research on news as myth.

Other support for a study of news as myth might be found in the so-called Chicago school of sociology, which advocated the study of society through its social symbols. John Dewey echoed the words of Lippmann when he said that news transforms an event, through symbols, into a matter of social import. "'News' signifies something which has just happened, and which is new just because it deviates from the old and regular. But its meaning depends upon relation to what it imports, to what its social consequences are," Dewey wrote (1927, pp. 179-80, his italics). In a similar spirit, Charles Cooley (1956, p. 83) called news reports "indispensable to the public mind," and Robert Park (1941, p. 372) said the news was a "form of social knowledge" that brought about social consensus on events.

Another Chicago school writer, George Herbert Mead, advocated, like Lippmann, a conception of the news report as a dramatic narrative. His words fit international news particularly well. The news recounts "situations through which one can enter into the attitude and experience of other persons," Mead said (1934, p. 257). "The drama has served this function in presenting what have been felt to be important situations." And like drama, news reports can carry "individuals beyond the actual fixed walls which have arisen between them," Mead added.

Lippmann and the writers in the Chicago school offered an approach that emphasized the social, dramatic nature of news reports. The philosopher Mircea Eliade went further and linked dramatic media narratives to myth. In 1957, Eliade (1959, p. 203) put forth the idea that modern man "still retains a large stock of camouflaged myths and degenerated rituals" in daily life. The mass media have become a large repository of "countless mythical motifs," Eliade said. Although Eliade made no explicit reference to news, his linking of mythology and mass media was an important early consideration in the development of study of news and myth.

Also in 1957, Roland Barthes published Mythologies, a collection of semiotic analyses of modern myths in subjects as varied as pro wrestling, advertisements, and novels. The collection was based on a consideration of news as myth. "The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history," Barthes wrote (1972, p. 11). News reports, like myth, are created in part from the assumptions and beliefs of culture, Barthes suggested. In turn, the reports can legitimate and justify assumptions and beliefs within culture. "Myth does not deny things," Barthes said (1972, p. 143), "on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal

justification."

Through semiology, the study of signs, Barthes set out to study the structure and form of news as myth. Marshall McLuhan, in a 1959 essay, "Myth and Mass Media," advocated an identical approach. "The effect of media, like their 'message,' is really in their form and not their content," McLuhan wrote (1959, p. 342). Through the study of such forms, he said, access could be gained to mythic, collective postures within the media.

McLuhan briefly but explicitly linked newspaper reports to myth. He called the newspaper a modern "Babel of myths" (1959, p. 347), with each news report offering its own mythic image of the world. "Each [news] item makes its own world, unrelated to any other item save by date line," McLuhan said (1959, p. 341). "And the assembly of items constitutes a kind of global image."

The emphasis on communication structure and form has been brought together with the Chicago school emphasis on symbolic systems in the American cultural studies approach of James Carey. In reviewing research on communications, Carey (1975) saw an important distinction between transmission and ritual views of communication. In terms of news, the transmission view emphasized the sending and imparting of information, exemplified by notions of news as informer of the public and observer of the state. The ritual view emphasized the representation of shared beliefs, exemplified by notions of news as a dramatic presentation of reality and a form of social consensus. The ritual-transmission distinction was an important contribution for

organizing discussions of news as myth.

Carey has directly applied the ritual view of communication to news. Reading a newspaper, he says (1975, p. 8), should be seen "less as sending or gaining information and more like attending a Mass: a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed." News, Carey says, "is a presentation of reality that gives to life an overall form, order and tone."

The last decade has seen a growth of research on the notion of news as a ritualized and stylized presentation of reality. Although devoted more to exploring the production of news, rather than an analysis of news content, the voluminous news-making literature has provided useful insights into the social construction of news reports. For example, Edward Epstein (1973) in News from Nowhere used field observations and interviews to study the effects of news organizations on the news report. In Newsmaking, Bernard Roshco (1975, p. 5) investigated the premise that "social structure is the major influence on the content of the press." Gaye Tuchman (1978) in Making News, studied organizational influences on news, conceived as a construction of reality. Herbert Gans (1979) combined field research and observation with a qualitative content analysis to study the presentation of enduring cultural values in the news. In Discovering the News, Michael Schudson (1978) traced the social, political, and economic factors affecting the development of the journalistic convention of objectivity. Todd Gitlin (1981) used

historical and literary analyses, as well as field research to study the social and political factors influencing the coverage of student groups in the New York Times. And researchers in American cultural studies have continued to analyze ritualized aspects of news and cultural forms (Real 1977; Carey 1977, 1985).

NEWS AS MYTH

Much of the theoretical and conceptual groundwork for the study of news as myth can be traced back to such influential writers as Lippmann, Mead, Barthes, and Carey. From such a foundation, communication researchers in the 1970s and 1980s began the specific exploration of the news report as myth.

A.J.M. Sykes (1970) examined ways in which myth appears in modern communication, including mass media. His view of myth (1970, p. 17) is quite specific: "The term myth will be used to mean the expression of abstract ideas in a concrete form." Sykes suggests that, "A myth takes the form of a story that embodies certain ideas and at the same time offers a justification of those ideas." And as myth, news would also take the form of a story that embodies and justifies ideas.

In 1975, Charles R. Bantz investigated symbolic themes used in ABC Evening News coverage of George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign. With an approach fundamentally mythic in nature, Bantz (1975, p. 125) studied television news not as

"objective reality captured" but as a "symbolic expression of a social construction of reality."

A similar analysis of mythic themes in television was offered by Robert Rutherford Smith (1976) in a book chapter, "Mythology and the Criticism of Broadcasting." Smith attempted to compare contemporary television programs with classical myths. For example, Smith compared news stories of migrant farm workers to the myth of Sisyphus, who must eternally push a stone to the top of a hill and retrieve it when it rolls down. Although such broad comparisons are mostly untestable, Smith says (1976, p. 27) the comparisons can be useful for suggesting the "underlying rhythms" of programs, rhythms "that tie them to one another and to the stories of past cultures, both literate and illiterate."

In 1979, Smith used a broad categorization scheme to code mythic elements specifically in television news. Assuming a relationship between news and myth, Smith coded television news accounts according to Jungian themes, such as man decides, villain caught, trickster, and wise old man. The study made no claim that television news created myths. But it was likely, Smith wrote (1979, p. 82), "that television is one of the media used for the transmission and reinforcement of the myths of our time."

Also in 1979, John Lawrence and Bernard Timberg analyzed "mythic selectivity" in the news. The authors studied news coverage of the hijacking and rescue missions at Mayaguez in 1975, Entebbe in 1976, and Mogadishu in 1977. Though the events

were similar, the study revealed that U.S. news coverage of each event varied greatly. The authors suggested (1979, p. 328) that an important criterion for newsworthiness was mythic adequacy, "the degree to which the features of an event conform to the pre-existing features of a mythic paradigm." In accounts of the rescue missions, much less coverage was given to the German rescue of hostages at Mogadishu because U.S. mythic paradigms portray Germans as either malicious aggressors or fools, the authors said. They concluded (1979, p. 329) that "perhaps the institutions of news, which often style themselves as the enemies of myth, are one of the principal means through which myths are subtly restated and given renewed vitality."

Gaye Tuchman reviewed much of the literature on news and myth in a 1981 essay, "Myth and the Consciousness Industry." Tuchman concluded (1981, p. 90), "News, then, presents a politically legitimated reality. And the news-frame thrusts that mode of interpreting the world on news consumers. As myth, news suggests that social and economic forces (never analyzed but detailed through the logic of the concrete) are 'primeval forces' akin to the bureaucratized legitimated institutions designed to cope with them." And, Tuchman added, "social and economic forces as legitimated institutions become actors in a post-industrial passion play."

The portrayal and legitimation of social institutions by news was also the focus of Graham Knight and Tony Dean (1982) in "Myth and the Structure of News." The authors analyzed Canadian

press coverage of the 1980 British recapture of the Iranian embassy in London. In the news accounts, violence by the Special Air Services Regiment of the British army -- including the killing of unarmed terrorists -- was legitimated. Violence by the terrorists -- including the killing of a hostage -- was not. The process of legitimation, Knight and Dean said, was accomplished through myth. The text "is normally structured in such a way that 'preferred' or 'dominant' meanings are difficult to resist," the authors wrote (1982, pp. 146-47). "Myth is part of the irresistibility; it provides the readers with formulas for decoding the text, appropriating its meaning without difficulty and effort."

News, myth, and the legitimation of ideology were also studied in a 1982 monograph "Myth in the Television Discourse." Myles Breen and Farrell Corcoran analyzed television programs, including news, and noted four mythic functions. They said, television offers a system of perception, models of behavior, conflict mediation, and the reification of culture. "It is hoped," they wrote (1982, p. 127), "that a more coherent understanding of the role of myth as a vital link between culture and communication will shed light on the manner in which ideology lives and dies in a modern society."

The use of myth to study the relationship between news and ideology has been central to the work of a number of researchers in British cultural studies. Stuart Hall (1982) has seen ideology as a system for coding reality, not as a system of coded

messages. Like myth, news draws from the dominant codes of a culture, Hall believes, thereby reproducing and maintaining the dominant ideology. "Just as the myth-teller may be unaware of the basic elements out of which his particular version of the myth is generated," Hall wrote (1982, p. 72), "so broadcasters may not be aware of the fact that the frameworks and classifications they were drawing on reproduced the ideological inventories of their society." In Understanding News, John Hartley (1982, pp. 29-30) said myth is "formed and reformed according to the relations beween social groups and forces." One of the primary functions of news is continuously to "signify myths through the everyday detail of 'newsworthy' events," Hartley said. "News is a myth-maker."

Recent research has continued to explore the notion of news as myth. Hal Himmelstein (1984, pp. 202-19) in Television Myth and the American Mind applied myth to a number of aspects of television, including news. He found myth in the personas of the heroic, investigative journalist and the omnipresent, omniscient anchorperson. He also suggested (1984, p. 217) that much news is based on one primary myth: "The basic operating frame of the myth is clear: An individual meets an institution in a confrontation."

The review of literature has shown that a small but intriguing group of studies have been devoted to news as myth. A number of articles have served as exploratory essays, suggesting

implications of news as myth. Other studies have investigated particular mythic aspects of news, especially the maintenance and legitimation of ideology. Some studies have discussed psychological and classical motifs of myth in the news.

The possibility and promise of focusing upon international news as myth has been supported by the literature. Mythic studies into news coverage of terrorism and political legitimation suggest that the international news report should be a promising area for a comparison of news and myth.

Understandably missing from an area only tentatively explored has been the development of methodologies capable of studying in detail the structure and content of news as myth. Scholarly discussions of news as myth should be supported by the pursuit of methods that can explore more precisely the extent to which news is like and unlike myth.

In summary, the review of literature has shown the value of studying international news as myth and the need for attention to methodology. The following section therefore will suggest a method, drawn from the field of myth analysis, capable of studying the structure and content of international news and capable of comparing individual news accounts with myth.

METHOD

The analysis of international news as myth is most concerned with news content. Although sensitive to the production of news and the complex contexts in which news is received and consumed, a study of news as myth gives a privileged position to the report. It is through analysis of the structure and content of the news report that myth might be found.

Traditionally, in communication research, the study of news messages has been undertaken through content analysis. Bernard Berelson (1952, p. 18) gave the classic definition of the method: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." The definition captures the strengths and limitations of the approach. Content analysis restricts itself to the description of manifest content by systematically noting the presence or absence of selected units or samples of communication. Although valuable for revealing broad patterns in large samples of international news, content analysis is not suited for the study of individual news reports.

Thus, the exploration of international news as myth would appear to suggest the use of interpretive methods, capable of analyzing the structure and content of individual news reports. Interpretive methods are also sensitive to the relationship between culture and its symbolic forms. The methods, including structuralism, metaphor analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, and psychoanalytic interpretation, are taken from a variety of

disciplines and give different emphases to linguistic, cultural, and historical aspects of interpretation.

The method suggested by this paper for the study of international news as myth is hermeneutics, the interpretation of cultural texts by means of analysis and commentary. Hermeneutics can be a broadly conceived method of great rigor and scope. It can encompass the key elements of many interpretive techniques. And it has long been used for study of the symbolic forms of culture, including myth. For an analysis of individual news reports, and a comparison of those reports with myth, hermeneutics should prove to be a valuable method.

Originally a term used for philological means of ascertaining authenticity of contradictory Christian texts, hermeneutics has also been the term for the interpretation of Biblical texts. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher (Mueller-Vollmer, 1985), and Wilhelm Dilthey (Mueller-Vollmer, 1985) extended hermeneutics to analyses in which a member of one culture strove to understand the experience of another culture through its written words. And in this century, hermeneutics has become a research tradition guiding interpretive studies in the humanities and social sciences.

Within hermeneutics, a variety of approaches exist with different emphases given to language, history, culture, and texts. For example, the hermeneutics of H.G. Gadamer (1979) stress the ontological and historical nature of understanding. Jurgen Habermas (1978) has emphasized the critical analysis of

language. Paul Ricoeur (1971; 1976; 1977) has concentrated particularly on the methods for understanding cultures through the interpretation of texts, including myths.

Because of its appreciation for the role of the text in the creation and confirmation of culture, and because of its emphasis on understanding cultures through methodical, textual interpretation, the hermeneutic approach of Paul Ricoeur is suggested as most valuable for the study of international news as myth. Ricoeur's work already has been adopted in a number of studies of communication and culture. In The Interpretation of Cultures, Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 19) builds a theory of studying social action as a symbolic text and cites Ricoeur, "from whom this whole idea of the inscription of action is borrowed and somewhat twisted." In his analyses of cultural metaphors, Stanley Deetz (1984) stresses that hermeneutics must recognize the role of the interpreter in understanding, as well as recognize the conditions under which cultural meaning is created. "Ricoeur," Deetz writes (1984, p. 217), "made clear these two directions in hermeneutic thought."

Ricoeur's work has not been applied to news and his method must undergo adaptations governed by the specific form of the news report. The following section proposes an adaptation of Ricoeur's procedures to an analysis of international news as myth.

PROCEDURES

Ricoeur's method is difficult to condense. Throughout five decades, his thinking has continued to evolve. His bibliography contains more than a dozen books and several hundred essays. His analyses are tempered to the subject; he does not work from a "cookbook" of interpretation that can easily be applied in a step-by-step design. With this acknowledgement of the complexity of Ricoeur's hermeneutic analysis, however, it is possible to derive basic guidelines from his work. The guidelines point to certain aspects of cultural texts that must be considered essential in hermeneutic interpretations. For Ricoeur, the essential aspects of a text include: acts, actors, narrative structures, significant symbols, metaphors, cultural assumptions and beliefs, textual "worlds" or world views, and ways of appropriation, that is, the ways of responding to the text offered by the text.

The study of these aspects can be adapted for a study of international news. First it must be noted that Ricoeur's analyses of myths assume that the texts will contain such aspects. The analysis is the interpretation of such aspects. With news, however, the presence of elements such as cultural beliefs and world views cannot be assumed. The adaptation of Ricoeur's hermeneutic to individual news reports thus first examines and explores the structure and cultural content of the news report. The analysis searches for <u>possible</u> acts, actors, narrative structures, significant symbols, metaphors, cultural assumptions and beliefs, world views, and ways of appropriation,

and then analyzes and interprets these aspects.

The study of international news as myth then would compare the structure and content of the report with the definition of myth. The question: To what extent does the structure and content of the individual news report fit the definition of myth: a cultural narrative in symbolic form that articulates a world view and invites consensus with that view? The following four steps suggest how hermeneutics might be used to explore the international news report as myth.

1. Structural analysis. The first step in the hermeneutic approach would employ a structural analysis to study the news report as a cultural narrative. Ricoeur's use of structuralism is derived from the work of scholars such as Claude Levi-Strauss (1967) and Roland Barthes (1972). Ricoeur attempts to "decode" the text, studying manifest and latent content and, he says (1976, p. 84), exposing "the logic of the operations." The examination of actors, actions, and narrative structures is a preliminary, but essential step in approaching a text.

For a study of international news as myth, structural analysis attempts to compare the news with the first elements of the definition of myth. To what extent is the news report, like myth, a narrative created and maintained within a culture of particular, historical circumstance?

a) actors. Structural analysis of a news report would first isolate and fully identify, when possible, all actors. How is an actor described? Does the actor implicitly or explicitly

represent a larger entity such as a nation, corporation, or cultural group? The actor is also identified by predicate and function. What role does the actor play in the report?

The analysis would search for textual cues of approval or exclusion. For example, quote marks and capital letters, are studied. The sentence, "The Vietnamese ambassador countered with his own 'peace' proposal," surely offers commentary on the actor through quotes.

b) acts. Careful attention is paid to action. The choice of words to describe action often can be based on assumptions and beliefs. For example: the implications of using the word "claimed" instead of "said." Another example: a news report might say the United States is prodding another country for an agreement, a term of action adapted from dealing with animals. Hermeneutic analysis explores the implications of such words.

The analysis also searches for patterns of portrayals. Is one nation consistently portrayed as acting while another is reacting? Is one nation usuallly cast in the active voice, while another is portayed with the weaker passive voice? Hermeneutics can examine patterns to begin the study of the news report as a portrayal of belief within a culture.

c) narrative structure. Another important part of structural analysis for hermeneutics is the construction of the text narrative, from origin to conclusion. This element is especially crucial for understanding news. In news reports, events do not unfold from beginning to end; indeed, the end will

begin the inverted pyramid report. Yet, following Aristotle (1982, p. 52), the analysis assumes that narratives must have beginning, middle and end. Structural analysis "reconstructs" each report to locate the narrative. It attempts to find the textual "logic" as the narrative moves from origin to conclusion.

For example, a British news report on the Soviet shooting of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 might restrict origins to the event itself. The reconstructed narrative would begin with the takeoff of the plane. Another account, however, might include information on past international reactions when airspace has been violated. Yet another news report might include information on past Soviet aggression, such as the invasion of Afghanistan. Each news report, while describing the same event, would ascribe to it different origins, based on assumptions and beliefs of how things are related in the world.

Through the study of narrative structure, insights can be gained about the relationship of international news and myth. Studies may find that news, like myth, brings order to experience through narrative. Again following the profound observation of Aristotle (1982, p. 52) that a narrative has beginning, middle and end, to see news as myth may lead to recognition of the incredible ability of news to bring order to the seemingly chaotic -- essentially chaotic -- events of daily life.

A comparison of the narrative qualities of news and myth might also focus research on the influence of narrative on news making. Stuart Hall observed that a "raw" historical event is

not reported in that form. "To put it paradoxically," Hall said (1980, p. 129), "the event must become a 'story' before it can become a communicative event." (His italics.) In other words, the appeal and demands of narrative help structure the observation and understanding of events by reporters and editors as well as readers. Studies of international news as myth may lead to further interest in the influence of narrative structure on the news and also lead to greater appreciation for the term -- too casually used -- "news story."

2. Metaphoric Signification

The second step in a hermeneutic analysis of a news story would be metaphoric signification, that is, the isolation and interpretation of significant metaphors, explicit and implicit, within the text. For a study of international news as myth, metaphors provide clues about culture. The work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), in Metaphors We Live By, suggests that metaphors are inextricably linked to the creation and maintenance of culture. Or as Deetz says (1984, p. 220), "In tracing the metaphors that are used by a society, we trace the very way people in that society experience things."

Metaphors in an international news report, as in myth, are take from culture and help reproduce culture. Metaphor analysis thus can be a key to understanding the cultural role of international news and the relationship between news and myth. The hermeneutic analysis of metaphor takes place in three steps.

a) binary metaphors. One of the tenets of structuralism is that metaphors often are implicitly placed in binary opposition within a text. According to structuralists, such as Levi-Strauss (1967), cultures -- and therefore cultural texts -- make sense and then order experience through the opposition of metaphoric elements, such as individual:institution, good:evil, nature:culture. The analysis of international news as myth would attempt to find if such metaphors are present in the news text. For example, U.S. news stories about the Soviet Union might employ binary metaphors of individual:institution in portraying the individualistic nature of the capitalist economy in contrast to the institutional nature of the communist state. U.S. news of Third World countries, which so often focus on natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, may be employing metaphors based on nature:culture in portraying Third World nations.

b) cultural context. Structuralism would conclude its analysis after the consideration of the actors, acts, narrative structures, and metaphors within a text. Structuralists see meaning as produced by and confined to the text. Ricoeur disagrees. He sees structuralism as an essential but only preliminary step in the full explication of a text. Critiquing the structural analysis of a myth, Ricoeur writes (1976, p. 84), "We can indeed say that we have explained the myth, but not that we have interpreted it." And, he continues (1976, p. 87), "I believe that if this were not the case, structural analysis would be reduced to a sterile game, a divisive algebra." Interpretation

comes from extending analysis, through hermeneutics, into the cultural arena.

In this view, a metaphor has meaning in a text but also in a particular culture. Indeed, metaphor has meaning in a particular cultural text, since a text is free to change or modify metaphors of its culture. A text bears traces of its culture but is not a mere reflection of culture.

Thus, the hermeneutic analysis of textual metaphor asks what does the particular language of the text mean to the culture from which the text is derived, and what meaning does that language have as used in the text? Hermeneutic analysis of an international news report would look for metaphors and attempt to establish their meaning within the framework of the particular text and within the framework of the particular culture.

c) metonymy and synecdoche. A study of metaphoric language in a news report attaches special significance to metonymy and synecdoche, metaphoric process through which a text might reveal assumptions and beliefs on which it is based. Metonymy, metaphoric language based on a functional relationship between two entities, can reveal assumptions of functions and relationships within a culture.

A news report might say, "The White House announced its displeasure." The metaphoric, functional replacement of the President of the United States by the building in which he lives invests the announcement with the power and tradition of the building. Likewise, the absence of metaphoric replacement in a

sentence such as, "The President offered apologies," might have a different effect in a news story, perhaps creating tension through the personal focus, or isolating the President in his apology. Depending upon context, the presence or absence of metonymy can have important implications.

Similarly, the study of synecdoche, the metaphoric representation of a whole by a part or a part by a whole, may reveal other beliefs and assumptions within a news report. The phrase, "America held hostage," proposes that the kidnapping of a number of U.S. citizens should be seen metaphorically as action taken against all Americans. As the title of a network news show, "America Held Hostage" is a synecdoche that reveals a particular belief in the relationship of individuals within culture, and the relationship of that culture to the outside world.

Thus, the analysis of metaphor can contribute to the understanding and interpretation of an international news report. For a comparison of international news with myth, metaphor analysis can help judge the extent to which a news report, like myth, casts its message in symbolic form. The emphasis on metaphor focuses on symbolic dimensions of the news text. While not critiquing the news report as a form to inform, interest, and entertain, the hermeneutic analysis of metaphor also recognizes the report as a symbolic form of culture.

And symbolic forms help create culture. Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 451) has said it well: "Quartets, still lifes, and

cockfights are not merely reflections of a preexisting sensibility analogically presented; they are positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility." Culture comes into being as a result of symbolic forms, which include cockfights, paintings, dance, architecture, sports, myth, and news. Hermeneutic analysis of an international news report would look for metaphors in the news text, and explore the role of news in the creation and maintenance of a culture.

3. The World of the Text. The first two steps of hermeneutic analysis attempt to uncover and examine structural and metaphoric aspects of the text. In mythic texts, structure and metaphors point to what Ricoeur calls the "world of the text." The text world is the referents, assumptions, beliefs, and "the system of values to which the cultural background of the text belongs" (1971, p. 145). Text world is close to the more common term, "world view." Yet, text world emphasizes that what is being studied is not only the world view of a culture but the textual interpretation of that world view -- not only a culture but a culture as conceived by a text.

For a study of international news, the hermeneutic analysis first must question whether the news report can be said to have a text world. Any comparison with myth must proceed carefully. Mythic texts often were conscious attempts by a culture to inscribe, in oral and then written form, its world -- its heroes, gods, enemies, traditions, values, and beliefs. It is as if the Greeks had used their system of fantastic tales to "express their

own distinctive view of the world," writes Jean-Pierre Vernant (1980, pp. 131, 134). "Seen as a whole, this system appears to have a fundamental social significance: it expresses how a group of people in particular historical circumstances sees itself, how it defines its condition of life and its relationship to nature and the supernatural."

A news report, however, is not a conscious attempt to present systems of beliefs and traditions. Yet, hermeneutic analysis can explore if a news report -- like myth, a symbolic form of culture -- bears traces of the assumptions, beliefs, and traditions of its culture. Does a news report, like myth, offer a textual world? Hermeneutics can focus on a number of clues.

a) literal referents. The search for a text world begins with the detailing of literal referents in the text -- acts, actors, settings, institutions, and other entities. For example, a close reading of Greek myths allows readers to discern fundamental components of the "Greek world," such as its laws, medical practices, attitudes toward women, and other facets of life. Similarly, reading a recent news account of arms negotiations can provide readers with an incredible number of referents to the modern world, including: the superpower dominance of the globe by the United States and the Soviet Union; the East-West division of the balance of power; the state of intense competition between the two, relatively young nations; the existence of nuclear arms; the threat of nuclear annihilation, and other referents to modern life that would

astound a reader from just fifty years ago. These referents provide the backdrop to a text world.

The text might even bear a kind of "attitude" toward the referents. Narrative structure, choice of verbs and tenses, descriptors and qualifiers, symbols and metaphors -- all can suggest a way of thinking about the referents. What is presented then would be not only the referents of a world but the suggestion of a <u>view</u> of the world.

b) <u>beliefs and assumptions</u>. The suggestions of a world then become the focus of hermeneutic study. Central to attempts to discover and display the possible world of a news report is the analysis of belief. The search for belief is implicit in every step of the hermeneutic procedures. In the study of narrative structure, especially origins and conclusions, the analysis may find the text offering belief of how and why particular events have occurred. For example, a Third World news report about the Soviet shooting of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 may suggest the incident resulted from continued U.S. espionage against the Soviets. Beneath the surface of the report may lie the belief that competition is an ongoing, inevitable aspect of modern foreign affairs. Another Third World account might assert the shooting was evidence of basic evil within the Soviet system. The account may also suggest that evil is an inevitable part of the human condition and that individuals -- and nations -- must be ever-vigilant in the face of evil. Through the exploration and interpretation of such beliefs, hermeneutics can begin to examine

a world within the news text.

Beliefs may also be discerned in the second step of hermeneutic procedures, metaphoric signification. For Ricoeur, the metaphor is a text in miniature. "A metaphor, in short," Ricoeur says (1976, p. 53), "tells us something new about reality." The affirmation of a metaphor -- the assertion that one thing is like another -- can allow access to beliefs, which can point toward the text world.

Also of central importance to understanding a textual world is what is not printed. The assumptions of a text -- often unstated -- are crucial. For example, alarmed reactions within some U.S. news reports in 1957 about the Soviet satellite, Sputnik, might be shown to contain a number of assumptions. One report might assume Soviet success is a threat to U.S. security. Another might assume U.S. superiority provides for a stable world. Beneath the surface, more profound assumptions may be found. A report may assume that technology itself is pivotal to peace and world stability. Another may assume that technology must necessarily be a site of contest and competition between nations rather than an arena for partnership and cooperation. Such assumptions, if found in a news report, would do much more than offer a description of the literal referents of a world. Assumptions would offer a view of the world.

A primary purpose of the hermeneutic analysis of an international news report then is to search for and then interpret any sign of a world view within the text.

"Hermeneutics then is simply the theory that regulates the transition from structure of the work to world of the work," Ricoeur writes (1977, p. 220). "To interpret a work is to display the world to which it refers."

Although it is acknowledged that a news text should differ significantly from a mythic text in its intentions and capacities to project a world, the hermeneutic analysis of literal referents, beliefs, and assumptions in international news should at least begin to reveal the extent to which a news report, like myth, can be said to project a world. Vernant (1980, p. x) poses a question that neatly captures the concerns of myth analyses: "To what extent and in what forms is myth present in a society and a society present in its myths?" For a comparison with myth, the same question might be addressed to the international news report.

4. Appropriation

The fourth and final step of the hermeneutic analysis is appropriation, the individual reader's possible self-understanding from the text. "To appropriate is to make 'one's own' what was 'foreign,'" Ricoeur says in Interpretation Theory (1976, p. 43). Appropriation is the counterpart to the offering of the text world. "The text speaks of a possible world," Ricoeur says (1976, p. 88), "and of a possible way of orientating oneself within it." Appropriation is much more than acknowledging the vicarious experience of a text, although that is part of it. Appropriation is the methodological fulfillment

of the hermeneutic axiom that a text speaks to someone about something.

Through appropriation, hermeneutic analysis strives to examine what understanding the text might offer individual readers. But there are many possible ways of understanding any one text. The many interpretations assigned to the Oedipus myth are prime examples. "It is part of the meaning of a text to be open to an indefinite number of readers and, therefore of interpretations," Ricoeur writes (1976, pp. 31-32). The hermeneutic circle of understanding flows between individual readers and a text, with readers arriving at different interpretations of the same text. Yet Ricoeur asserts that a text attempts to guide responses, and that some responses therefore would be more "probable" than others. Thus, hermeneutic analysis can attempt to ascertain the more probable responses offered for appropriation by a text.

For international news, appropriation suggests that readers might extend their understanding of themselves through their engagement with news. The notion that news might increase self-understanding goes much further than notions of news as information and entertainment. Appropriation recognizes the news report as an active participant between individuals and worlds.

The third step in the hermeneutic analysis of a news report questioned if a possible world had been offered by a text. The fourth step then would proceed to explore possible responses to this world offered for appropriation by the text.

a) direct address. One way hermeneutic analysis can discern offers of appropriation is through the study of direct address. An attempt to appeal directly to a reader, direct address can be seen as a possible offer of appropriation. In international news, the use of direct address, with "you" or "we," is rare. More common forms of address in the news, however, are references to "the public" or "the nation," broad terms that attempt to include the reader. For example, if events within the Middle East were portrayed in a report as harmful to "U.S. interests," the text certainly could be said to be offering a response to U.S. readers.

b) linguistic cues. Appropriation in a news report may be offered by phrases such as, "the alarming developments," "the terrifying news," or "the chilling story." Such cues attempt to dictate possible responses to the text. Other linguistic cues might be more subtle. Quotation marks, or the words "alleged" or "claimed," may immediately disparage one point of view in favor of another.

c) cultural models. A news report may attempt to direct responses through the use of government spokespersons, cultural leaders, or even "average citizens" whose reactions might serve as models for appropriation. Another model might be offered by the presentation of "both sides" of a story, such as views of the United States and Soviet Union, or Democratic and Republican. This model suggests only two points of view on a subject are available. Responses are limited to one of "two sides."

d) interpretation as appropriation. An important aspect of appropriation in Ricoeur's analysis is the recognition that the hermeneutic interpretation itself is one of the responses to the text. The text projects a world to be appropriated by individual members of a particular culture. But because of the permanence of the printed word, the text can outlive its culture and offer its world to other cultures, which may derive interpretations quite different from (but no less valid than) the original culture. The hermeneutic analysis therefore views itself as just one part of this chain of interpretation.

Ricoeur (1971) derives a model for this dimension of appropriation from the work of Charles S. Peirce on signs. Peirce (1985) conceived of the sign as open-ended, capable of producing infinite interpretations. Ricoeur (1971, p. 150) likewise sees the text as a sign able to offer endless interpretations, which become a "chain of interpretation produced by the interpretative community and incorporated into the dynamics of the text." Ricoeur's favorite examples in this regard are the letters of St. Paul. Originally addressed two thousand years ago to the Romans, Corinthians, and other groups, the letters are still read and interpreted by modern Christians -- and hermeneutic scholars.

Hermeneutic interpretation acknowledges that its analysis is only the latest in a chain of understanding derived from the world of a text. With this acknowledgement, hermeneutics removes itself from a positivistic affirmation of the meaning or the

interpretation of a text.

Through the study of appropriation, then, hermeneutic analysis attempts to examine possible understanding offered by a text to individual members of a culture. For a study of international news as myth, the analysis of appropriation might suggest a different perspective on the news report. News might be seen not merely as a straightforward, historical account of an event but as an opportunity for individuals to participate in the creation of culture, and conversely, in the creation of themselves. A reader may "make one's own" what was once foreign.

Northrop Frye wrote (1964, pp. 63-64), "You wouldn't go to Macbeth to learn about the history of Scotland -- you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul." And though one might come to the New York Times to learn about Watergate and the Nixon presidency, one may come away with new understanding of the nature of power and desire within culture, within man, and perhaps within oneself. Similarly, Geertz (1973, p. 450) says the Balinese go to cockfights to find out what a man feels like when, "attacked, tormented, challenged, insulted, and driven in result to the extremes of fury, he has totally triumphed or been brought totally low." Likewise through news, one can come to an account of a Panamanian boxer and perhaps know the exultation of gloved hands raised high in the ring or the indescribable despair that brings one to drop once-proud hands and whisper, "No mas." Through symbolic forms of culture, individuals may come to an understanding of

experience, of life. Hermeneutics attempts to find if the international news report does indeed offer such understanding.

LIMITATIONS

Having outlined the procedures for applying Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach to individual news reports, limitations of the method must be acknowledged. A primary limitation, inherent in the approach, is the microscopic nature of study. Using hermeneutics, a researcher could study only a handful of news reports for a comparison with myth. The approach assumes that a culture can only be understood from the minutiae of its symbolic forms. Geertz writes (1973, p. 28), "The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics." But the commitment to densely textured facts limits the number of forms that interpretive research can consider.

Another limitation of hermeneutics is that analyses do not lead easily to predictions of future results, an integral component of more empirical research. According to Denzin (1983, p. 130), the goal of interpretive studies must be not prediction but "the presentation and interpretation of a sequence of symbolic interaction." Hermeneutic studies of international news reports thus can make no claim for prediction of coverage about the same events in other newspapers, nor offer predictions about coverage of different events in the same newspapers. Hermeneutic studies can offer only the presentation and interpretation of the individual news report.

A related concern is the generalization of results. A hermeneutic analysis of news as myth could not be constructed to yield results generalizable to other news reports. Yet, the study might find patterns within the interpretation. As Geertz describes interpretive studies (1973, p. 26), the goal is "not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them." Hermeneutics might identify mythic elements within a text or a small sample of texts. Although such processes could not be generalized to other news reports, the identification of mythic processes or patterns certainly would have value for future research into news as myth.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A comparison of international news and myth has been offered as a means to investigate cultural dimensions of the news report. After reviewing the literature on news and myth, the paper proposed the hermeneutic method for the analysis of individual, international news reports as myth. The procedures of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic analysis, adapted to news, should be able to examine in great detail the structure and content of the news report and allow a comparison of the news report and myth.

The first step of the hermeneutic procedure is a structural analysis that explores the possible actors, acts, and narrative structures of the text. The second step is metaphoric signification, which examines the significant symbols and metaphors of the report, searching for the opposition of

structural elements, such as good:evil, as well as establishing the cultural and historical contexts of metaphoric language. The first two steps may suggest the presence of a text world, that is, a system of traditions, values and beliefs to which the cultural background of the text belongs. The third step, the construction of the text world, explores the news report for the literal referents, cultural assumptions, beliefs, and traditions that might suggest the report is offering a world view. The fourth step is appropriation, the individual reader's possible self-understanding as derived from the text. The analysis studies the text for forms of address, linguistic cues, and cultural models that might determine if a news report, like myth, is offering ways of responding to a world.

The hermeneutic procedures should provide a balance of linguistic, cultural and historical approaches to individual, international news reports. However, limitations of the method have been acknowledged. Hermeneutics restricts a study to microscopic analysis of a small number of texts. No sampling, in the statistical sense, would be possible. No predictions would be derived from the study. Results could not be generalized. However, hermeneutics can offer a methodologically sophisticated, interpretive approach to the study of international news reports, and allow a comparison of the news reports with myth.

The paper has also attempted to explore conceptual implications of news as myth. The approach would not critique traditional conceptions of news but instead offer an additional

conception. Along with its traditional role of reporting world events, the international news report may be serving as an integral form of cultural expression. Like myth, news might be studied not only as a report of events -- the shooting down of an airliner -- but as a symbolic form of culture.

The paper has offered an exploration of international news as a form participating profoundly in a truly central purpose of culture -- the offer of meaning, order, and affirmation amid the absurdity, chaos, and despair of life. The study of international news as myth suggests news can be studied and interpreted as one of the symbolic forms -- such as dance, architecture, sports, drama -- by which a people create and sustain culture and through which a culture creates and sustains meaning. And the study of international news as myth links the researcher of international news with those would analyze and interpret the symbolic expressions of cultural life.

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